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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3199
INFO AMEMBASSY ASUNCION
AMEMBASSY BRASILIA
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AMEMBASSY ROME
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK
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ARGENTINA PROJECT (S200000044)

U.S. DEPT. OF STATE, A/RPS/IPS

Margaret P. Grafeld, Director

(☒) Release (☐) Excise (☐) Deny

Exemption(s):

Declassify: (☐) In Part (☒) In Full

(☐) Classify as (☐) Extend as (☐) Downgrade to

Date Declassify on Reason

[REDACTED] SECTION 01 OF 03 BUENOS AIRES 06943

CINCSO FOR INTAFF, CINCLANT ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
TAGS: SHUM, PGOV, AR
SUBJ: HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS IN ARGENTINA

1. SUMMARY: BRINGING HUMAN RIGHTS OFFENDERS TO JUSTICE CONTINUES TO DRIVE THE HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT. KNIFE WIELDING BY RETIRED ARMY MAJOR GENERAL MENENDEZ, AND THE SAGA OF FORMER BUENOS AIRES PROVINCE POLICE CHAPLIN VON WERNICH, HELPED REINFORCE THIS THEME IN THE PUBLIC'S MIND IN AUGUST. THE SABATO COMMISSION ON THE "DISAPPEARED" HAS NEARLY COMPLETED ITS WORK. WHEN THE COMMITTEE DISBANDS, PRESIDENT ALFONSIN MAY CREATE A PERMANENT BODY TO WATCH OVER HUMAN RIGHTS. A CONTRO-

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VERSIAL FIGURE FROM THE RECENT PAST, JACOBO TIMERMAN, GAINED EDITORIAL CONTROL OVER A MAJOR AFTERNOON DAILY, JUST AS THE ALFONSIN ADMINISTRATION IS VIEWING THE PRESS WITH A MORE JAUNDICED EYE. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) MILITARY/SUPREME COUNCIL

ON AUGUST 22 THE NATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT OF APPEALS GRANTED THE ARMED FORCES SUPREME COUNCIL THE SECOND, OF A POSSIBLE THREE, 30-DAY EXTENSION TO CONTINUE TRYING THE NINE MEMBERS OF ARGENTINA'S FIRST THREE MILITARY JUNTAS. THE SUPREME COUNCIL ALSO IS CONSIDERING PAST HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AT THE NAVY MECHANICS SCHOOL, AND THE CASES OF FORMER PRESIDENT AND RETIRED ARMY GENERAL REYNALDO BIGNONE, AND FORMER BUENOS AIRES PROVINCE POLICE CHIEF AND RETIRED ARMY GENERAL RAMON CAMPS. HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS CONTINUE TO EXPRESS THEIR DISMAY AT THE SLOW PACE OF THESE MILITARY TRIALS. ACTIVE-DUTY OFFICERS ALSO WERE PROMINENT IN THE NEWS AS THE SENATE CONSIDERED RECOMMENDED MILITARY PROMOTEES, SOME OF WHOM APPEARED IN A LIST, PRESENTED TO THE SENATE BY SIX HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS, OF 896 OTHERS ALLEGEDLY INVOLVED IN PAST HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES. PERONIST SENATOR LUIS SALIM TOLD THE PRESS THE SENATE WOULD ONLY APPROVE THE PROMOTION OF MILITARY OFFICERS NOT ACCUSED OF SEVERE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS. THE AIR FORCE LIST WAS APPROVED AS SUBMITTED TWO WEEKS AGO. THE UCR SENATOR WHO CHAIRS THE COMMITTEE REVIEWING THE PROMOTION NOMINATIONS PREDICTED FINAL ACTION THIS WEEK ON THE ARMY AND NAVY LISTS.

3. (U) MILITARY/GENERAL MENENDEZ

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ARGENTINES SAW AN ASTONISHING REMINDER OF THEIR RECENT PAST IN MID-AUGUST. RETIRED ARMY MAJOR GENERAL LUCIANO BENJAMIN MENENDEZ, EX-COMMANDER OF THE THIRD ARMY CORPS, APPEARED ON A TELEVISION PROGRAM TO REFUTE ALLEGATIONS AGAINST HIM OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS. HIS APPEARANCE PRODUCED A DEMONSTRATION OUTSIDE THE TV STUDIO. AMONG THE GROUPS PARTICIPATING WERE THE MOTHERS OF THE PLAZA DE MAYO, THE COMMUNIST YOUTH, THE INTRANSIGENT YOUTH, AND

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THE RADICAL YOUTH MOVEMENT. DISAGREEMENTS AMONG DEMONSTRATORS LED TO THEIR DISPERSION BY POLICE. WHEN MENENDEZ EXITED THE STUDIO, ALL THAT REMAINED WERE SOME 15 MILITANTS OF THE COMMUNIST AND INTRANSIGENT YOUTH GROUPS. AS MENENDEZ GOT IN A CAR WHERE HIS WIFE AND DAUGHTER WAITED, THE DEMONSTRATORS KEPT CALLING HIM A "MURDERER". THIS PROVED TOO MUCH FOR MENENDEZ, WHO JUMPED FROM THE CAR WITH A LARGE UNSHEATHED PARATROOPER'S KNIFE, AND HEADED FOR THE DEMONSTRATORS. THOUGH HIS BODYGUARDS HELD HIM BACK, THE SCENE WAS PHOTOGRAPHED AND PUBLISHED ON THE FRONT PAGE OF EVERY MAJOR ARGENTINE NEWSPAPER. THREE RADICAL CONGRESSMEN MADE A JUDICIAL COMPLAINT OF "ABUSE OF ARMS" AGAINST MENENDEZ. THE COMMUNIST PARTY, THE INTRANSIGENT PARTY, AND THE MOTHERS OF THE PLAZA DE MAYO ALSO FILED A NUMBER OF CHARGES, INCLUDING ATTEMPTED HOMICIDE. COMPLAINTS MAY ALSO BE FILED AGAINST RIOT POLICE ON THE SCENE, WHO REPORTEDLY ARRESTED THREE DEMONSTRATORS, ROUGHING THEM UP AND THREATENING THEM ON THE WAY TO THE POLICE STATION, YET LET MENENDEZ DRIVE AWAY. THE THREE WERE RELEASED THAT SAME NIGHT. ON AUGUST 28, MENENDEZ WAS DETAINED AT A MILITARY BASE ON THE ORDERS OF THE SUPREME COUNCIL OF THE ARMED FORCES, WHICH IS INVESTIGATING THE CHARGES MADE AGAINST HIM OF SERIOUS HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS WHILE HE WAS COMMANDER OF THE THIRD ARMY CORPS IN CORDOBA. MENENDEZ HAD VOLUNTARILY GONE TO THE

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CINCSO FOR INTAFF, CINCLANT ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
TAGS: SHUM, PGOV, AR
SUBJ: HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS IN ARGENTINA

SUPREME COUNCIL AND ACCEPTED RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL
COUNTERTERRORIST ACTIONS CARRIED OUT UNDER HIS ORDERS.

4. (U) THE NATIONAL COMMITTEE ON THE DISAPPEARANCE
OF PERSONS (CODEP)

ON AUGUST 9, CODEP TOLD THE PRESS THAT OVER THE LAST
SIX MONTHS IT HAD SUBMITTED EVIDENCE TO COURTS ON 520
CASES OF MISSING PERSONS. THIS COMMISSION, HEADED BY
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WRITER ERNESTO SABATO, NOW PLANS TO DELIVER ITS FINAL
REPORT PRIOR TO THE END OF SEPTEMBER. DURING
SEPTEMBER, SABATO WILL ALSO RECEIVE AN AWARD FOR HIS
HUMAN RIGHTS WORK FROM THE ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN
STATES IN WASHINGTON. PRESIDENT RAUL ALFONSIN TOLD
MEMBERS OF THE PERMANENT ASSEMBLY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ON
AUGUST 23 THAT HE WAS CONTEMPLATING THE CREATION OF A
STANDING OFFICIAL BODY TO WATCH OVER HUMAN RIGHTS IN
ARGENTINA ONCE CODEP FINISHES ITS WORK AND DISBANDS.

5. (U) TIMERMAN RETURNS/OTHER PRESS DEVELOPMENTS

AN INTERESTING JOURNALISTIC EVENT OCCURRED ON AUGUST 15
WITH THE RETURN OF FORMER PUBLISHER AND DETAINEE JACOBO
TIMERMAN TO A POSITION OF EDITORIAL INFLUENCE. THE
CONTROVERSIAL JOURNALIST WILL TAKE OVER AS DEPUTY EDITOR
WITH FULL OPERATIONAL CONTROL OF THE MIDDLE-OF-THE-ROAD

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AFTERNOON DAILY "LA RAZON". THAT PAPER'S BOARD IS ALSO CONSIDERING COOPERATING WITH TIMERMAN IN REOPENING HIS CLOSED MORNING DAILY, "LA OPINION".

6. [REDACTED] COMMENT: ON HUMAN RIGHTS MATTERS, IF NOT OTHERS, TIMERMAN MAY MOVE "LA RAZON" TO A POSITION MORE CRITICAL OF THE GOVERNMENT. THIS NEW "THORN" COULD FURTHER INCREASE CONCERN IN RULING CIRCLES OVER PRESS ATTITUDES. ALFONSIN, FOR ONE, REPORTEDLY FEELS JOURNALISTS ARE WEIGHING THEIR STORIES AGAINST HIS ADMINISTRATION. END COMMENT.

7. (U) THE CHURCH

HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS PERIODICALLY ACCUSE THE CATHOLIC CHURCH OF WASHING ITS HANDS OF EVENTS THAT OCCURRED [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

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DURING THE SO-CALLED "DIRTY WAR" AGAINST SUBVERSION. THEY ARGUE THAT BY STANDING BACK AND NOT ACTING, THE CHURCH CONTRIBUTED TO THE BLOODBATH WHICH OCCURRED. AS HEBE DE BONAFINI, PRESIDENT OF THE MOTHERS OF THE PLAZA DE MAYO, HAS TOLD THE PRESS, "WITH REGARD TO THE PARTICULAR CASE OF THE CHURCH, I DON'T BELIEVE THAT IT LACKED THE FORCE TO DO SOMETHING TO AVOID THE MASSACRE INTO WHICH ARGENTINA SUNK." IN THE LAST MONTH, THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH UNDER THE MILITARY REGIME HAS AGAIN BEEN DISCUSSED PUBLICLY. THIS NEW VISIBILITY ARISES THROUGH ACCUSATIONS THAT FORMER BUENOSAIRE PROVINCE POLICE CHAPLIN CHRISTIAN VON WERNICH WAS INVOLVED IN HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS. HE IS SAID TO HAVE BEEN PRESENT AT SEVERAL TORTURE-MURDERS. ANGERED AT HIS PAST SILENCE ON THESE MATTERS, ARGENTINES ALSO WONDER WHETHER HE GAVE COMFORT AND SOLACE TO THOSE BEING KILLED OR TO THE KILLERS. VON WERNICH WILL BE TRIED IN A CIVIL COURT FOR ALLEGEDLY PARTICIPATING IN QUESTIONING ILLEGALLY-DETAINED PRISONERS DURING THE FORMER MILITARY REGIME. ON AUGUST 28, THE HOUSE CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE PUNISHED VON WERNICH WITH SEVEN DAYS' ARREST FOR STATING IN A RECENT MAGAZINE INTERVIEW THAT CONGRESS WAS OUT TO "DESTROY THE CHURCH AND THE ARMED FORCES," AND FOR USING TERMINOLOGY TO DESCRIBE CONGRESSMEN THAT SOME OF

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THEM TERMED "DEMEANING."

8. (U) OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

THE BUENOS AIRES MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT IS DISCUSSING WAYS TO IMPLEMENT A PROGRAM OF HUMAN RIGHTS INSTRUCTION IN THE CAPITAL'S SCHOOLS BEGINNING IN 1985. LETTER AND PHONE THREATS CONTINUE TO BE MADE AGAINST SOME PROMINENT HUMAN RIGHTS AND LEFT-WING POLITICAL FIGURES. DIS-

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AMEMBASSY LONDON
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P.O. 12356: DECL:OADR

PAGS: SHUM, PGOV, AR

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AGREEMENTS BETWEEN SOME ORGANIZATIONS CONCERNED WITH HUMAN RIGHTS ARE GROWING. MUCH OF THIS DISAGREEMENT

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URNS ON DISPARATE VIEWS OF THE ALFONSIN GOVERNMENT'S HANDLING OF HUMAN RIGHTS. ONE OF THE DISSATISFIED ORGANIZATIONS, THE MOTHERS OF THE PLAZA DE MAYO, CHARGED ON AUGUST 17 THAT, "DR. ALFONSIN HAS NOT FULFILLED, UP TO NOW, HIS PRE-ELECTION PROMISES NOR WHAT HE PROMISED US A LITTLE AFTER ASSUMING OFFICE." IN A NEWS CONFERENCE ON AUGUST 24, INTERRUPTED BY A BOMB THREAT,

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MOTHERS' PRESIDENT BONAFINI FURTHER CHARGED THAT OVER 90 PERCENT OF THE JUDGES APPROVED BY THE EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE BRANCHES THIS YEAR HAD BEEN JUDGES UNDER THE PRIOR MILITARY REGIME. EDUCATION AND JUSTICE MINISTER ARAMBURU HAS PLACED THIS FIGURE AT 70 PERCENT.

9. COMMENT: BRINGING THE MILITARY TO JUSTICE WILL CONTINUE TO BE THE CENTERPIECE OF HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS FOR SOMETIME. THE WIDE AND DEEP REACTION IN THE PUBLIC TO THE VON WERNICH CASE AND TO MENENDEZ'S KNIFE WIELDING INDICATES THERE IS CONSIDERABLE PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR BRINGING AT LEAST SOME MILITARY PERSONNEL TO JUSTICE FOR THE CRIMES COMMITTED DURING THE 1970S. MANY TOOK THE MENENDEZ INCIDENT AS PROOF THAT THE MILITARY HAVE LEARNED NOTHING FROM THE RECENT PAST. WITH THE RESULTS OF THE ARMED FORCES SUPREME COUNCIL'S TRIALS ON THE HORIZON, THIS PUBLIC INTEREST IN HUMAN RIGHTS WILL CONTINUE. THE DESIRE FOR JUSTICE, AND A FEAR OF A RETURN TO MILITARY AND RIGHT-WING TERRORISM, UNITES THE HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT, ALTHOUGH DIFFERENCES ARE BECOMING INCREASINGLY APPARENT AMONG THESE GROUPS. THESE DIVERGENCES MAY GROW ONCE THE SUPREME COUNCIL RENDERS ITS DECISIONS. MEANWHILE, THE ALFONSIN ADMINISTRATION WALKS THE LINE IT PREVIOUSLY ESTABLISHED BETWEEN THE WHOLESALE ARMY TRIALS SOME HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS DEMAND AND IGNORING THE PROBLEM AS THE MILITARY DESIRES.

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